Lean Six Sigma Success in the Office of the Surgeon General

Improving Human Resources In-processing at Office of the Surgeon General (OTSG)

Any work setting requires new employees to undergo an in-processing phase, often characterized by activities like filling out paperwork and reading manuals. Some in-processing procedures are quick, easy, and self-explanatory, while others are burdensome and complex.

Prior to 2006, the latter was the case at the Army's Office of the Surgeon General (OTSG). Every new OTSG staff member endured in-processing procedures averaging nearly three weeks, although sometimes their wait lasted as long as *eighty five* days. The most significant operational impact was that new OTSG staffers were late in assuming their duty assignments due to the cumbersome internal on-boarding process.

Lieutenant Colonel Rick Dickinson is the Chief of Force Management in OTSG Human Resources, and a Lean Six Sigma (LSS)-trained Green Belt. He identified the problem and helped find the solution. Dickinson says that after "looking at several of the processes to see where the holdups were, we discovered that OTSG needed a simple, lockstep process that would significantly improve the situation."

First, LTC Dickinson conducted a Rapid Improvement Event (RIE) to identify "quick fixes", resulting in the delivery of a detailed memorandum from the OTSG Chief of Staff, reiterating and clarifying the standards for in-processing procedures to the entire staff. Next, using the LSS DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control) method, a new in-processing plan was developed that ultimately simplified the entire process.

In the end, the in-processing became virtual. A computer was provided within the OTSG's Assistance Center, where new employees login and virtually 'check in' to various in-processing work stations. They input the proper information and prepare the proper paperwork for signature. One central computer now does the work of what many people in the past had scrambled to keep track of; the solution is completely automated.

LTC Dickinson, a 19-year Army veteran who led the changes at OTSG realizes that LSS not only clarifies solutions to problems, it also brings about success. The success lies in what LTC Dickinson's project generated: OTSG's cost avoidance for 2007 is projected at $167 thousand. Also, the average on-boarding cycle time significantly dropped from 17 to 5 days. The numbers tell the final story.